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ABSTRACT

A new readmission policy at Salisbury State College for students who were academically dismissed is described, and data are presented on dismissals and readmissions from Fall 1974 through Fall 1976. Academically-dismissed students may be readmitted in time to enroll for the next semester provided they apply for readmission through the Office of the Academic Dean. As part of the application process the student meets with academic counselors and writes a letter to the dean explaining the resolution of the problem that contributed to failure. Readmission is dependent on: there being adequate facilities at the college to accommodate the students who want to return; and the admission criteria predict the student is capable of succeeding. The data suggest that the readmission policy is providing capable students the opportunity to complete college. It is mutually advantageous to students and the college that there is no arbitrary method of determining who is eligible to return to the institution. (SW)

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SELF-SELECTION FOR READMISSION AFTER ACADEMIC DISMISSAL - AN EXPERIMENT

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SELF-SELECTION FOR READMISSION AFTER
ACADEMIC DISMISSAL - AN EXPERIMENT

In the Fall semester of 1974, Salisbury State College embarked on a new readmission policy concerning students who were academically dismissed. In general, the policy permits the student who is academically dismissed the previous semester to decide whether or not to return as a matriculated student the next semester. This essay is a description of the process and an analysis of the consequences.

Prior to this major policy change, readmission of academically dismissed students followed essentially three steps:

1. After not being permitted to attend the College for at least one semester, the student made an application for readmission.
2. The student had an interview with the counselor in the Office of the Academic Dean.
3. The Committee on Admissions, consisting of faculty members and administrators, discussed each individual case and decided whether or not to readmit the student. In only exceptional cases was the student permitted to participate in the Committee's deliberations.

This process is very similar to those found in many of the colleges and universities in the United States. Despite its popularity, there are some disadvantages to this process. First, the process demands a considerable number of manhours on the part of staff members in the Academic Dean's Office and the faculty members and administrators serving on the Committee. Especially during the break between the Fall and Spring semester, there is often insufficient time to deliberate satisfactorily. Secondly, in every case, the decision to readmit a student is very subjective and often arbitrary. At times, it is advantageous for a student to have one of the faculty members on the Admissions Committee for a class; at other times, it is a disadvantage. Third, the composition of the committee often is the more persuasive factor

concerning readmission than the type of students who are reviewed by the committee. Some committees are more lenient than others and even the same committee is not consistent over time.

Because of these factors, the following readmission process was developed: A student who has been academically dismissed may be readmitted in time to enroll for the next semester provided that he applies for readmission through the Office of the Academic Dean. As a part of the application process, the student writes a letter to the Dean explaining how he has resolved the problem that contributed to his lack of success and discusses his academic difficulties with one or more academic counselors. After reviewing the student's academic record and discussing the student's academic plan, if the student and the counselor(s) agree that the student's continued enrollment is appropriate, he is readmitted. Should the student and the academic counselor(s) disagree on his continued enrollment, the student may appeal to the Committee on Admissions.

This readmission policy should be implemented only if two conditions prevail:

1. The College has adequate facilities to accommodate students who wish to return. If facilities are limited, the dilemma arises of allowing students to continue who have already experienced academic difficulty thereby denying places for incoming students who predict academic success.
2. The admission criteria predicted that the student who was academically dismissed is capable of experiencing academic success at the institution.

Now that the College has pursued this policy for two years, how has it worked? Have the fears of many been verified - that a large number of ill-prepared and unmotivated students will inundate the campus? Has it helped to identify students who can succeed? The remainder of this paper will try to answer these questions.

THE DATA

In the Fall of 1974, 161 students were notified that they were dismissed because of academic deficiency. The following Spring, 75 (47%) of those students were readmitted. Of the remaining 75, thirty-five students returned the following Fall semester. Figure 1 presents a graphic illustration of the attrition for the remaining semesters.

Of the original 161 students, a total of 12 students graduated; two in the Spring of 1976, two in the Fall of 1976, five in the Spring of 1977, and three in the Fall of 1977.

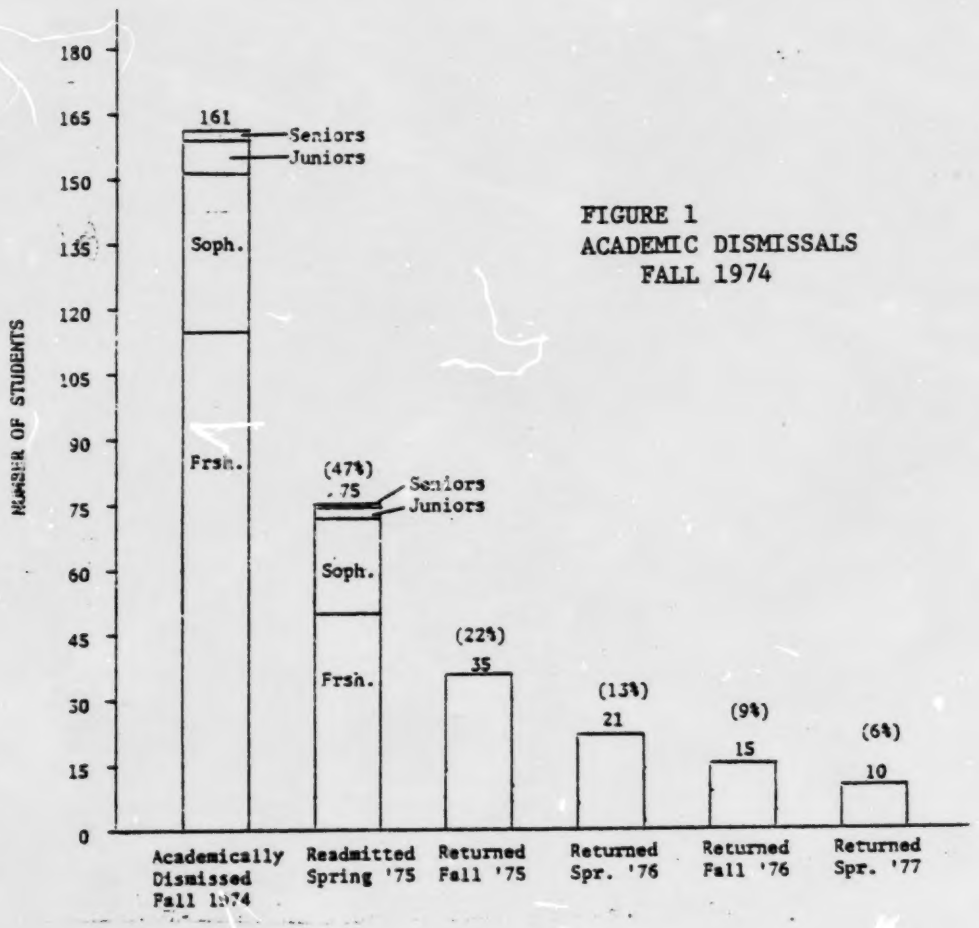


FIGURE 1
ACADEMIC DISMISSALS
FALL 1974

A total of 176 students were notified of their dismissal in the Spring of 1975. Of that number, 76 (43%) returned in the Fall and 33 (19%) returned the following Spring. Figure 2 illustrates the attrition for those students dismissed in the Spring of 1975.

Twelve students eventually graduated from this group; one in the Fall of 1975, four in the Fall of 1976, four in the Spring of 1977, and three in the Fall of 1977.

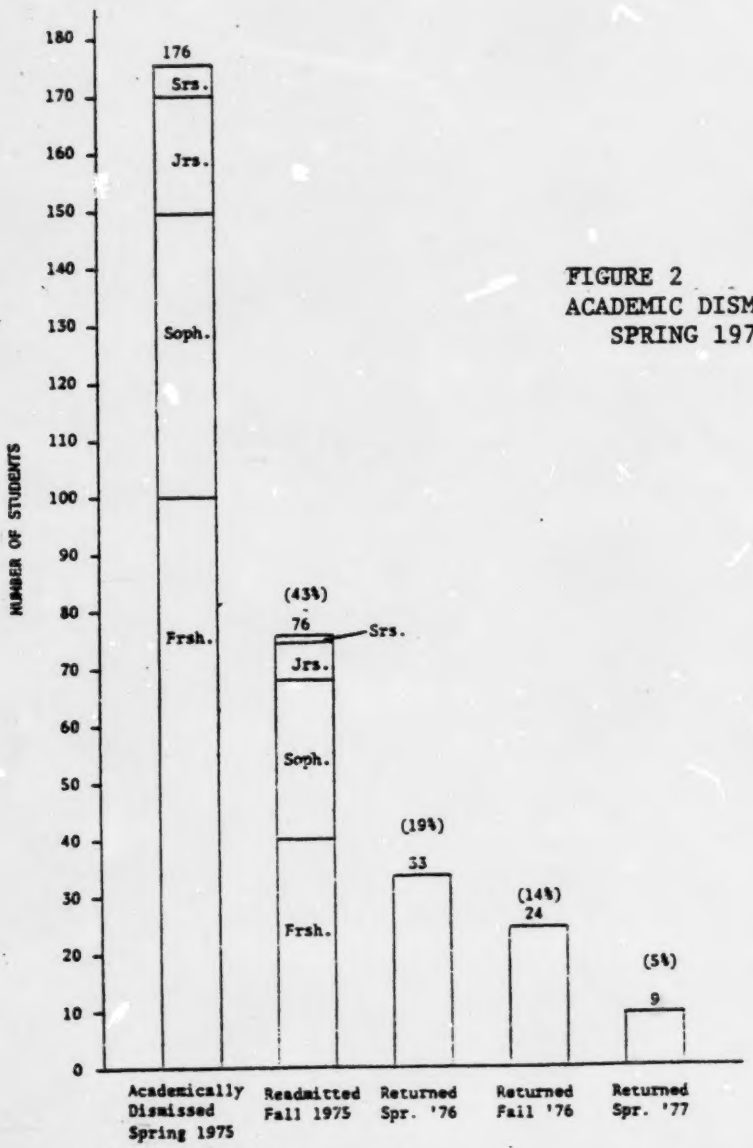


FIGURE 2
ACADEMIC DISMISSALS
SPRING 1975

Figures 3 through 5 illustrate the same data for students dismissed in subsequent semesters.

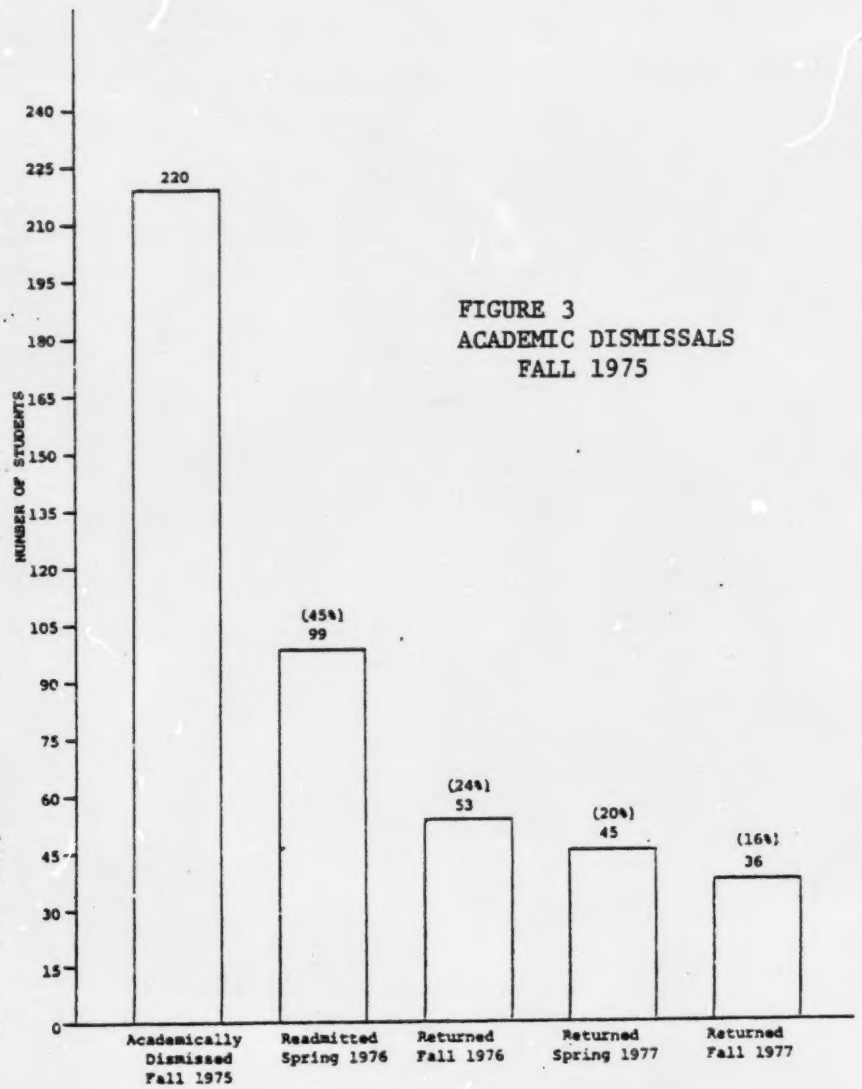


FIGURE 3
ACADEMIC DISMISSALS
FALL 1975

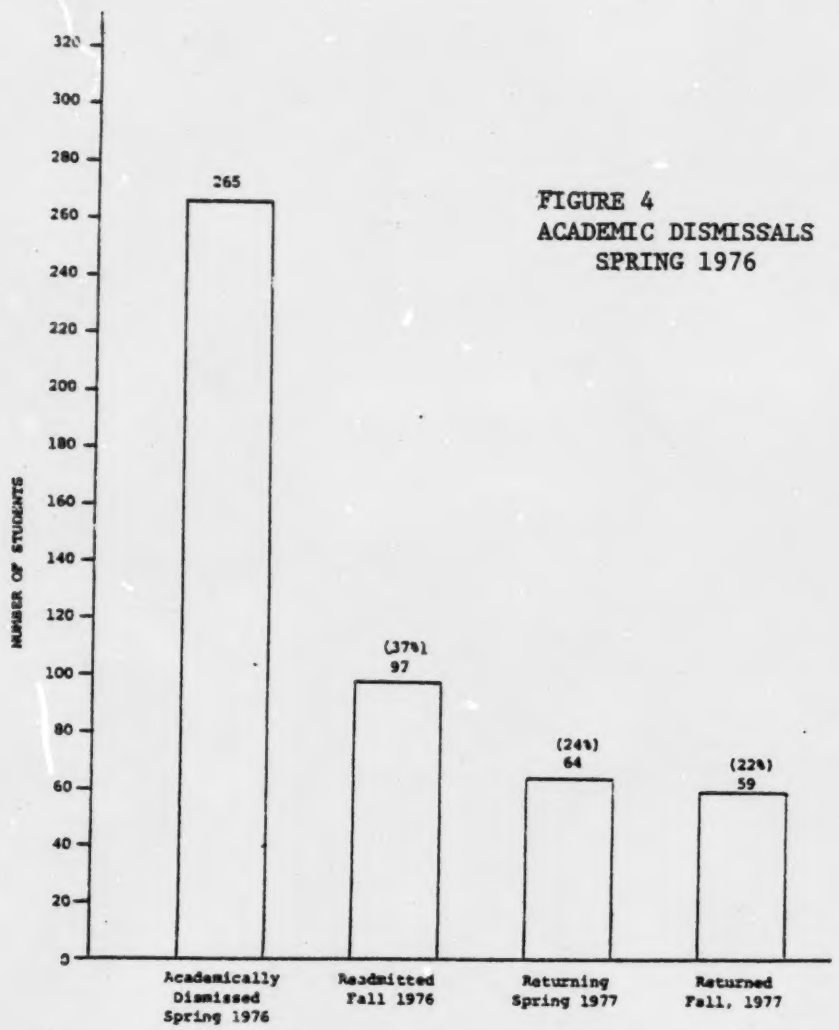


FIGURE 4
ACADEMIC DISMISSALS
SPRING 1976

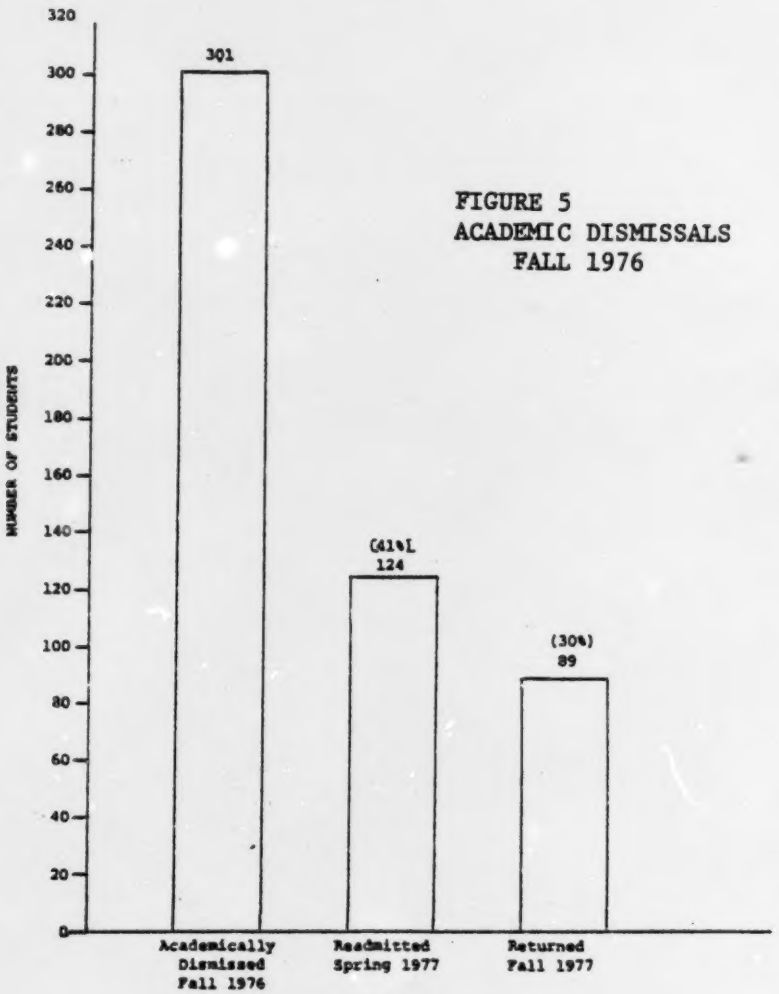
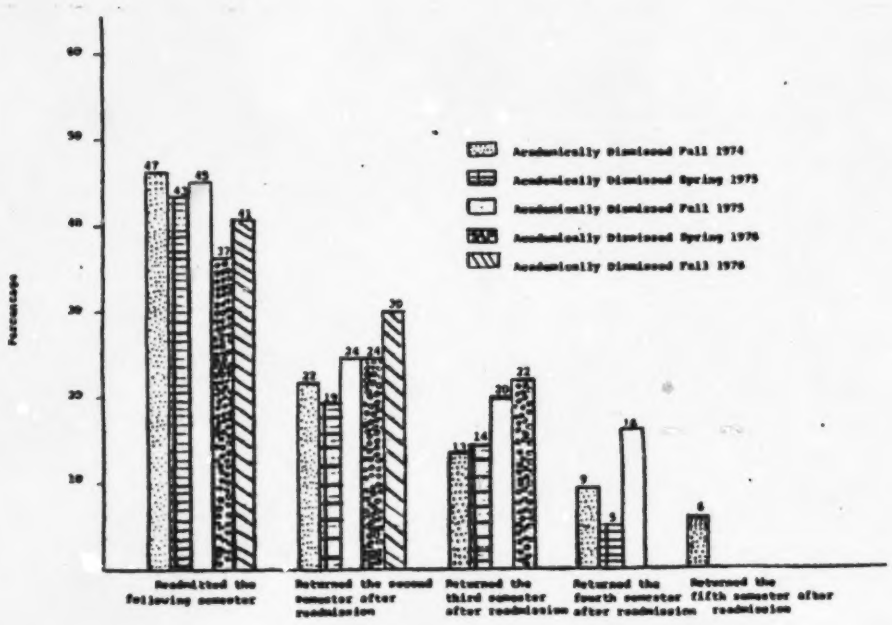


FIGURE 5
ACADEMIC DISMISSALS
FALL 1976

A comparison of the percentage attrition of those students who were notified of their academic dismissal for the semesters from Fall 1974 through Fall 1976 is show in Figure 6.

FIGURE 6

COMPARISON OF PERCENTAGE ATTRITION OF THOSE STUDENTS WHO WERE ACADEMICALLY DISMISSED FALL 1974, SPRING 1975, FALL 1975, SPRING 1976 AND FALL 1976



SUMMARY

The College has now had enough experience with its readmission policy to offer some qualified conclusions. First, it is interesting to note that, in every case, less than 50% of the students who were academically dismissed were subsequently readmitted and the data contained in Figure 6 indicates that progressively fewer students are being readmitted after academic dismissal. For those students academically dismissed at the end of the fall semester, the percentage has dropped from 47% to 41%. For those students academically dismissed in the spring, the percentage drop is from 43% to 37%. It is expected that more students apply for readmission after being academically dismissed in the fall semester than those students academically dismissed after the spring semester and the data confirm this expectation. Students who were dismissed at the end of the fall semester had few alternatives from which to select. There are few job opportunities and it is very difficult to transfer to another institution during the midsemester, particularly if one has been academically dismissed. Dismissal in the spring semester, however, provides the student the opportunity to seek some alternative career plan or seek enrollment at another institution.

Secondly, although progressively fewer students are being readmitted, progressively more students are returning in the second and subsequent semesters. A tentative explanation of this phenomenon involves the increased expertise and professional growth of the academic staff. The academic counselors who have the responsibility of discussing with each candidate his or her reasons for readmission have gained valuable experience and have acquired insights which they did not have previously. Their skill in dealing with a particular type of counseling situation is

probably much keener than counselors who have not had the experience. Consequently, the counselors have been more successful in helping to identify and advise those students who have the appropriate motivation for successful continuation at the College and those who lack the necessary motivation and/or ability (at least at the present time) to successfully compete academically. It should be understood, however, that in the vast majority of cases the decision to return to the institution is made by the student, not the counselor. (As with any general policy, there are exceptional situations when the institution will not allow a student to continue as a matriculated student. These cases are rare, however). The data suggest that a larger percentage of students apparently weighed the probability of continuing their academic careers at the College and opted for alternative activities.

This brings us to the question that is asked by many faculty members. Will this readmission policy result in an unprecedented member of ill-prepared and unmotivated students who will have an adverse effect upon the teaching-learning process in the classroom? It appears that the accumulation of students dismissed and returned in previous years equal about 6% of the total undergraduate population. Consequently, if one were to average students throughout each classroom, we would find that there would be approximately two students who have been academically dismissed and subsequently returned to the College in each class of twenty-five. Since a portion of these students experienced academic success, it is reasonable to conclude that the academic program is not adversely affected by the return of the academically dismissed students.

This leads us to the last and most important issue. Has the readmission policy helped to identify students who will succeed? The

answer lies in the process. By refraining from making an institutional judgment on who may return, the College permits the individual student to determine his own future. As has been shown by the data, a considerable number of students were academically dismissed again or simply stopped attending the institution. However, there is a portion of those students who were able to overcome their academic deficiencies and successfully complete their career by obtaining the baccalaureate degree. It is this very point which attests to the success of the readmission policy. The business of this College is to help people succeed academically. The data that have been compiled so far suggests very strongly that this process is allowing those students who are capable of completing a college curriculum the opportunity to do so. And, most importantly, it has done so with very limited institutional judgments.

Students who are not experiencing academic success eventually leave the institution. Those students who begin to experience academic success after faltering grasp at the opportunity to continue, and the academic integrity of the institution is not tarnished. Indeed, by eschewing an arbitrary method of determing who was eligible to return to the institution, the College's integrity is enhanced. The end result, then, is that the College and the students are served to the mutual benefit of both.

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